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**FINGER-PRINTS CAN BE FORGED.**

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BY MILTON CARLSON.\*

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In the interest of Science, and for the protection of an innocent person who may be charged with a crime, I am writing this.

I have covered a dagger with human blood and placed a finger-print thereon—forged.

In the Literary Digest of October 18, 1919, there appears a most interesting article: "Finger-print Testimony in Court." This relates to the testimony of a finger-print expert at a murder trial in New Jersey. Upon the murdered man's shirt was found a finger-print in human blood—the defendant's, it was claimed.

It is this identical finger-print in human blood that I have placed upon a knife dripping in blood, although the hand of the New Jersey man has never touched the same. We are more than 3,000 miles apart (provided the accused murderer is still in New Jersey), and I do not know the man. The knife was new when I bought it. To avoid even a lurking suspicion that a finger-print of the accused or others might be on the blade, it was subjected to a severe scouring, as the scratches thereon will verify. No hand, living or dead, has touched the place where the "finger-print" now appears. It is simply a *forgery* of the same finger-print or, to be critical, the same thumb-print of which there is a "Marked Enlargement Made from Print on Victim's Shirt," appearing on page 23 of the Literary Digest of October 18, 1919.

We live in a troublesome age, murders, forgeries, crimes of every class are of frequent occurrence. Never before has there been greater demand for means of detecting criminals, and correspondingly great is the demand to know that the innocent one is not to suffer for a crime he has not committed. And justice demands that no guilty one shall escape, hence there is a special demand for experts on particular sciences. There is no better evidence than that which a qualified expert produces.

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The eye may not see and the ear may not hear all of an occurrence, and time dims the recollection—frailties of man. The weakness of ordinary witnesses in courts who testify to facts that they have seen, or heard, or done, is too well known to need extended illustration. Only too frequently is such testimony shaken, oftentimes completely shattered under cross-examination. The ordinary witness has naught to present to the Court but that which he *thinks* he remembers he has seen, heard or done. Not so the expert on finger-prints, or on handwriting, or on a questioned document. The thing *itself* is placed in ocular observation for the adjudicators to determine the truth or falsity of the very thing in question. The expert points out to them the many essential details, associated and tabulated, the *facts that do exist*. It is the expert's many years of study, training, aptitude, that enables him to show material facts that would pass the untrained eye unobserved;—if observed, unassociated with the materiality the fact bears to the issue.

It is but the *close resemblance* of some of the letters in a writing, and the *general resemblance* of some of the lines found in a finger-print, that unreliable "experts" venture to express an opinion upon, and upon which the ordinary person *concludes*. Such is of no value; in fact, it is dangerous. One who is skilled in a science, can and does find and show that which a forger has inserted that does not belong, and that which the forger has omitted that should have been inserted—details that prove the facts. "Can you prove, Mr. Finger-print Expert, that that particular finger-print is *NOT* forged?" is a vital question. If it can be proven beyond a doubt that the finger-print in question is the impression made from the hand and by *contact* of the hand of the defendant, then finger-print testimony is of some value. If the expert on finger-prints cannot *prove* its genuineness or falsity, his testimony is of no value.

Heretofore finger-print testimony has consisted of showing corresponding lines, abrupt endings of lines, bifurcations or where the "ridges" divide, cicatrices (meaning in plain English scars), or other similarities. The question has not, until now, been raised as to whether or not the print in question is forged. This is a vital question. It must be answered positively.

In recent years great strides have been made in chemistry, electricity and other sciences; former methods have been revolutionized. That which was impossible then, is of daily occurrence now. *Miracles* of yesterday are *facts* today. Parts of the body of one person are grafted onto another. And thus the demonstration: that the "finger-print" of a person, living or dead, may at any time be found on the vault of a bank, a book, a gun, or a knife dripping in human blood, though he be thousands of miles away, never having seen, much less touched, the place where his finger-print is found.

Forged or *transferred* finger-prints will be more difficult to detect than the skillful forgery of a writing. The reason is obvious. A finger-print is merely the marks upon a substance made by the pressure of the finger,—not unlike the marks made by a rubber-stamp imprint. Press the finger on a rubber-stamp ink-pad, then press the inked finger on a paper. A perfect finger-print is the result. Ridges, cicatrices, and all are there. Press a rubber-stamp on the same pad, press it on a paper and all its ridges, etc., are there. Each of the "prints" provides the means of determining the identification of the thing that made the print. If the finger has on it dust from a foundry, the finger-print will leave some of the dirt in the print; if the finger has on it wet blood, the finger-print will be in blood, etc. All substances of which a finger-print is formed is easy of access; that is, can be obtained. Since the substance that *composes* the lines or ridges can be obtained,—so far a forgery of a finger-print is easy. To secure the *form* of a finger-print is admittedly easy,—even unknown to the person. To place the *form* on the object desired, *is the final step*—and I have done this.

The form of a finger-print is mechanical in appearance; is presumed to never change. That finger-prints remain the same, is the claim of finger-print experts. Mind, will, emotions, conditions, training, etc., do not control, modify, make or alter the lines of the finger, is their assertion. If this be true, to complete a *perfect forgery* of a finger-print, the *exact form* is as easy to make as is any steel ruler, surveyor's tape, or a wheel within a wheel. There is more than one way to forge a finger-print.

Handwriting cannot be forged by mechanical means. It can-

not by mechanical means be made sufficiently like a true writing but the ordinary observer will readily detect the fact. The many "circular letters" received daily proves this assertion.

Handwriting, to deceive the average person, must be produced by a living individual. The forger must reproduce in writing not alone the *forms*, but also the individual characteristics, habits, customs, emotions, the speed and all other idiosyncrasies possessed and created by the person whose writing he attempts to imitate. The forger at handwriting must not only be able to do this, but he must at the same time *omit all* of his own "forms," habits and personalities. This is the impossible. The handwriting expert, or more properly the "examiner of questioned documents," is not limited to this bounteous field in his investigation to determine the genuineness of a document. Each case arising has factors that he can associate to demonstrate the proof of his opinion. The forger at handwriting cannot at all times secure the kinds of materials requisite, as is the case in finger-print forgery. The particular ink, the pen, quality of paper, the printed forms, etc., are absolute essentials.

A simple illustration: A paper presumably written in the year 1870 is in question. Paper of that date is not everywhere to be had. If a paper of a later date be used, that fact alone would prove the fraud. This brief illustration serves to show that a forgery at handwriting may be proved beyond a doubt, while the proof of the genuineness or falsity of a finger-print is yet to be demonstrated.

Near the body of the murdered is found a knife, covered with human blood. Upon its blade is a finger-print. If the lines, core, delta, peculiarities of this print correspond with the print from the defendant's hand, is that alone sufficient proof that his hand *touched* the blade? If the lines, core, delta, peculiarities of the print on the blade do not correspond with the print of the suspect's hand, shall that fact alone prove that another had touched that bloody blade, and therefore turn the assassin loose?

Must not the genuineness of the entire finger-print itself be first determined, ere the comparison of "lines" becomes of probative value? How will this be accomplished?